18:Sutlive E,M-5 (1957-1971) 1973 OC6 Iban OC6
Sibu

THE SETTING

Environment and Economic Bases of Sibu

000 Sibu is the administrative and economic headquarters of the Third Division, the largest of the five political divisions of Sarawak. It is the main center of an area of more than 22,000 square miles, or nearly one-half of the entire state, with a population of more than 300,000 people, consisting mainly of Ibans, Chinese, Malays and Melanaus.

The Sibu District is an irregularly shaped area of 1,305 square miles, comprising the Urban District (20 square miles) and the Rural District (1,285 square miles). The Sibu District extends from the mouth of Sungai Bonan on the northwest coast of Sarawak through the Batang Lassa south to Lubok Skubol, east southeast to the division of the Batang Rejang and Batang Léba'an, east to the branch of the Sungai Durin, thence north northeast past Bukit Tinggi, north northwest to the Batang Igan and at Kut inland to the South China Sea three miles west of Sungai Mudan. The Sibu Urban District is located on the northern bank of the Batang Rejang from Upper Lanang Road to Sungai Merah on the Batang Igan, and inland to the Airport.

A. Environment

● 13 Considerable attention must be given to the environment of the Sibu District in particular and Third Division in general, for the

13 ecological adaptation of the Ibans, Chinese and other groups has been made in terms of that environment. A century ago, the Sibu District was covered with virgin jungle cut by a labyrinth of streams and large navigable rivers. Unlike the fertile areas of Java which benefit from what Geertz (1963-38), citing Mohr, has called a

> "happy combination of . . . the four elements of the ancient world: fire, water, earth, and air,"

the environment of the Sibu District offers no such happy combination. Nevertheless, certain resources have been found and from the exploitation of these the ways of life in rural and urban areas have been developed.

153 1. Soils

> "The greater part of Sarawak is geologically very young, and well over four-fifths of the State comprises Tertiary and Quarternary sediments" (Jackson 1968-16).

134 The Sibu District is composed of deposits laid down during the Quarternary Period, principally of podsolics and peat soils. On the "Soil Map of Sarawak, Malaysia Timor, 1968," published by the Agriculture Department, the District is almost uniformly described as consisting of "mainly deep peat soils" (Histosols). In areas near the mouths of the principal rivers of the Third Division, there is little other soil than peat. Farther upriver and in the Sibu District, the peat swamps are broken up by hills of podsolics, shales and other soils.